1: Orans E-5 (1957-1958) 1965
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development and characteristics of this emergent great tradition. In seeking such understanding, attention has been focused on the shifting historical pressures for and against acculturation and assimilation, and on the impact of a spreading market economy, industrialization and political democracy. Though this is not at all a monograph purporting to tell all about a particular people, the events described are largely the experience of a single tribe, the Santal, who live primarily on the Chotanagpur Plateau of Bihar, West Bengal, and northern Orissa in India. This is, then, in part "their story," understood often in terms peculiar to their experience. Nevertheless, the experiences of the Santal suggest certain widely prevalent processes which I call the "rank concession syndrome." These processes are speculatively held to pertain to all part-societies which have conceded rank to a dominant surrounding society. In particular the pressures for and against assimilation are regarded as crucial determinants and these in turn are seen to depend significantly upon shifting avenues of mobility. Movements of self-conscious cultural creativity are viewed in relation to the conflicting stimuli generated by pressures for and against assimilation. There are adequate if not compelling theoretical and practical reasons for making the Santal the object of such a study. The characteristically primitive world-view and social organization of traditional Santal culture provides a sufficiently contrasting background against which to view the impact of such modern conditions as the market, industrial employment and political democracy. Similarly the heavy commitment to pursuit of pleasure and the characteristically unreflective character of traditional Santal culture contrast sharply with the dominant surrounding Brahmanical tradition. Their patterns of social interaction and group structure rest heavily upon a markedly patrilineal kinship system

38 Mukherjea O. Y-4, 5 (ca. 1933-1939) 1952
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[P. 1]

CHAPTER I

SANTAL GENESIS AND MIGRATION

(ACCORDING TO TRADITION)

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[101]

The Santals form a niche in the great museum of races in India and being one of the Pre-Dravidian tribes of the Central Belt of India, an enquiry into their origin and subsequent developments, is one of the most fascinating though difficult tasks facing the student of social history. When one remembers the fact that even the history of political India is being written and rewritten in the light of new research, one can perhaps readily excuse the investigator into the pre-historic races of India, who, proceeding on insufficient and hazy data has to frame theories on the basis of myths and folk-lore and very often lands himself in mudbanks and fog.

Out of this dimness and obscurity certain facts help us with their light, as we proceed to trace the earliest history of the Santals. There is no manner [197] of doubt that the tribe belongs to the generic Muṇḍà family. The Santal traditions support this and the Muṇḍà myths corroborate the assumption. So an enquiry into the origin of the Santals is inextricably blended with the rise and migration of the Muṇḍà family till (according to their traditions) they split up into separate tribes.

3t Mukherjea O. Y-4, 5 (ca. 1933-1939) 1962
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a grassy field called Bàṛi badwak' [Dr. Campbell says that it means a common grass. (*Panicum Colonum*, L.n.). The seeds are eaten during scarcity of food]. Then they crossed a forest and found themselves on the plains of Jona Jòspur. From this place they came over to Khàspal Belaoñja.

Here, they scattered themselves in many directions as they chose. Some went to Sir, some to Sikhàr, while others to Nagpur. Thenceforward, the Santals were, to a greater extent, under Deko (non-Santal) influence. They could preserve their independence only by contracting matrimonial alliances with the Hindus. They are no longer called Kharwars. Here an explanation as to why they are called Santals, is forthcoming; for there are some who say that as they lived for some time in the country of Sànt,[1] beyond Sikhàr, they are called Sanotar[2] (*Santal*).

1. Sant = The Santals of Mayurbhanj according to the Census report of 1931, were called Kherwals or Kherwars (Santals Puritan) before they settled in the country round about a place called Saont in Midnapur. P. 151. Risley (*People of India*, App. VIII) says that Santals ruled here for 200 years.

2. From Saont, Risley adds, "Again pressed by the Hindus, they wandered on under a Raja called Hambir Singh to the eastern part of the Manbhum district near Pachet. Here after a while their Rajas adopted the Hindu religion and set up as Rajputs, so that at the present day they intermarry with the family of the Raja of Surguja.

3: Mukherjea O. Y-4.5 (ca. 1933-1939) 1962
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Here the Santals became the tenants of the king of Sikhàr but we hear that the Dekos seized their lands and property and drove them away. It is at Sikhàr that the Santals learnt how to observe the *Chatapòròb*[1] (one of Santal festivals). From Sikhàr some of the Santals came to Tundi near Dhanbad.

The Santals regard stability as the biggest of their tribal problems. Their forefathers exhorted upon them not to cross the river Ajoy, but they had to go against their wishes for the sake of bread. And in course of time they have found themselves in the Santal Parganas. With a characteristic naivetè, the Santals say that like the caterpillars

But the people would not change their religion, so they left their chief to rule over the Hindus, and wandered on to the Santal Parganas where they are settled now."

People of India, App. VIII, pages clviii-clix. Risley has some reflections on the origin of the name "Santal." He says that according to Mr. Skrefsrud it is a corruption from "Saontar" and was adopted by them after their sojourn for several generations in the country about Saont in Midnapur. Before they went to Saont they were said to have been called Kharwar, the root of which, *khar* is a variant of *hòr*, 'man', the name which all Santals use among themselves. Col. Dalton expressed a doubt whether the name of the place may not have been taken from the tribe, "a doubt strengthened by the discovery of a small tribe of Saonts in Surguja and Keonjhar." Risley does not think the point of importance as the Santal always now calls himself "mañjhi."

1. Chata-pòròb = Observed in Mayurbhanj on the 12th day (Dwadasi) before the Bhadra Purnima (full-moon in the month of Bhadra, Aug-Sept).

3t Mukherjea -O. Y-4, 5 (ca. 1933-1939) 1902
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167 they are advancing, grazing and eating. But still they have not yet been extinguished from the face of the earth. They do not know where they will go next. Some have crossed the Ganges. It is not known why Ṭhàkur (*the Creator*) is punishing them in this way.

128 114 We consider that it will be instructive at this stage to refer to the traditions as collected and commented upon by the previous antiquarians so that our story of Santal genesis and migration may be examined in the light of these.

114 167 Mr. E. G. Man, one of the earliest writers on the Santals,[1] quoting the opinion of Mr. Sutherland, Joint Magistrate of Monghyr, (1817) refers to the "Sonthars who emigrate (in the Santal Parganas) from the Beerbhoom and Ramghar district, and even from the Nagpur territory." An old [173] Santal told him that they came from "Chai Jumpa" in the Nagpur district, and their migrations were due to the oppressions of a "Mahadeo Singh". [101] They first called themselves "Shaitals" which was gradually corrupted into "Sonthars." Now they are known as Santals. Some of them say that they were originally "Kerwars."

[113] 1. Ref. *Sonthalia and the Sonthals*, E. G. Man, page 11.

3t Mukherjea O, Y-4, 5 (ca. 1933-1939) 1902
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173 167 648 Now the Santals and Mundàs parted company. The Santals left Nagpur (Chotanagpur), crossed the Damodar and settled down in Sikharbhum (the modern district of Hazaribagh) and later on, followed the course of the Damodar and passed on to Manbhum[1] and to the Santal Parganas, while the Mundàs preferred to remain in the forest-covered regions of what is now the Ranchi district.[2]

175 167 *Historical Basis of Santal Migration in the Santal Parganas*[3]

The history of Santal migrations does not however remain conjectural in the 18th Century, as we have authentic records to go upon. These will show that whatever their original habitat might have been, they were settled in the Chotanagpur plateau and in the adjoining districts of Midnapore and Singhbhum, and that they began to move to the north towards the close of the 18th Century.

[101] In 1795, we find them described as "Soontars" living in Ramgur (Ramgarh), a "rude and unlettered

1. The Santals of Mayurbhanj when questioned by us as to whether they were autocthonus in the place replied that they came from Sili Sikhar, some from Manbhum, while others from Dhalbhum. They asserted that Mayurbhanj was not their original seat.

2. Ref. *The Mundàs and their country*, S. C. Roy, page 111.

[113] 3. With acknowledgements to the *Dt. Gazetteer*, Santal Parganas, Vol.XXII. pp. 95-99.

3t Mukherjea O. Y-4,5 (ca. 1933-1939) 1962
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tribe" by Lord Teignmouth (Sir John Shore) "who have reduced the detection and trial of persons suspected of witch-craft to a system." By the first decade of the 19th Century, the Santals had settled in considerable numbers in Lakerdewani *i.e.*, Hundwe and Belpatta of the Santal Parganas, two tracts outside the hills. They had made their way from Birbhum, where they appear to have been brought to clear the country. This is clear from a reference to Montogomery Martin's *Eastern India* (compiled from Buchanan Hamilton's manuscripts) which contains references to the "Saungtar" with their three peculiarities *viz.*, their contempt for Hindu prejudices, their belief in witch-craft, and their communal system. The manuscripts of Buchanan Hamilton refer to 500 such Santal families, who gave their original home as Palamau and Ramgarh. But they came then from Birbhum in consequence of the annoyance of zemindars. They are said to be "very expert in clearing forests and bringing them into cultivation."

By 1819, the Santals had made their way (according to Sutherland's account) in the Godda subdivision and by 1827 to its extreme north. These Santal pioneers were now closely followed by others of their tribes between 1836-51, so that by 1851 (according to Captain Sherwill's accounts) there were no less than 83,265 Santals in the Damin-i-koh alone.

3t Mukherjea O. Y-4,5 (ca. 1933-1939) 1962
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Sili Sikhar,[1] some from Manbhum, while others from Dhalbhum. They asserted that Mayurbhanj was not their original seat.

Conclusion

We would conclude this chapter with a discussion of the origin of the name "Santal." In this connection, it is worthwhile to remember that the Pre-Dravidian Muṇḍà tribes uniformly designated themselves as Hòṛ, Hòṛò or Ho. The words mean "man." It implies that the tribes were proud enough to consider themselves as men, and indirectly thought of the rest of mankind as sub-human. Even to-day one can hear a Santal saying, "Mit' hòṛ dòñ ñèlledea bañ dòe Hòṛ kan bañ dòe Diku can" (I saw one man, but I cant't say whether he was a Santal or a non-Santal). The traditional origin of the Santals however consistently refers to them as Kharwars. A legend about the origin of the name was referred to us by Raghunath Mañjhi, teacher of Rairangpur, Mayurbhanj, which goes to show that the forefathers of the tribe got the name from a hero of that name. There are many at Mayurbhanj, who derive

1. 'Sili' is one of the Eastern parganas of the present Ranchi district. 'Sikhar' is probably an abbreviation of 'Sikharbhum', the ancient name of Manbhum dt. It is in the territory of the Raja of Panchacote.

3i Mukherjea O. Y-4, 5 (ca. 1933-1939) 1962
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101 the word "Kharwar", from "Kshatriya", meaning those who fight. But that this is a popular belief in the state may be stated without fear of contradiction. This may be true or otherwise, but the fact remains that even now, many will describe themselves as "Kherwals" if not "Kharwars."

Now coming to the word "Santal", we find it distinctly stated in their traditions that they got the name because they were living in Saont (*Sant* as they call it) which has been identified with the present Silda *Pargana*. Mr. W. B. Oldham, C.I.E., is of opinion that the name is an abbreviation of the word "Samantawala," (Samanta *lit. bordermen*), being another name given to the Silda *Pargana*, the suffixes *al* in Hindi and *ar* in Bengali being used to form possessional adjectives, the name Santal (or Sonthal) being only an English form. This suggestion is based on the analogy of all Pathans, either Khorasani or Baluch being called Kabulis, and all Hindusthani moneylenders, named Bhojpuria irrespective of the fact whether they are Marwaris or otherwise, because the most conspicuous of their kind came from Kabul and Bhojpur (*in Sahabad*) respectively.[1]

1. The etymological discussion of the word "Santal" has been compiled from the *Dt. Gazetter*, Santal Parganas, 1910, pp. 99-100.

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Whatever that may be, the present-day Santals would cut short the nomenclature of their tribe by calling themselves "Mañjhis," being the honorific title of their village headmen. The movement has gone so far that the modern Santal hardly uses his clan-name after his first name and writes "Mañjhi" instead.

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614 174 101 that one has been lost. Regarding the *Bedeas*, it is important to note the fact that there exists in Mayurbhanj, a tribe of aboriginals bearing the same name. And naturally it struck us if the extinct clan of the original Santals developed into a separate tribe in course of time. Our enquiries revealed however that the *Bedias* of Mayurbhanj do not identify themselves as Santals in origin, nor do the Santals consider them to be of their tribe. The 101 162 following extract from the *Census Report of Mayurbhanj*, Vol. I, page 157 may usefully be quoted here:—

"According to the present census, the total strength of the Bedias, who call themselves *Chot Kurmi* or *San Kurmi*, is 578, with 292 males and 286 females. They are all returned from the Bamanghati subdivision. Though they claim to be allied in one way or another to the *Kurmis*, the latter relegate them to the position of that class of gypsies, acrobats and snake-catchers, who under a similar name but with a different spelling (*Bediya*) are found in Bihar. This small tribe is known in the state for their filthy habits and criminal propensities."

101 174 In this connexion, it is however important to remember that the *Kurmis* (or Kurmbis) with whom the *Bedias* of Mayurbhanj ally themselves, belonged to the parent stock of the Santals in course of their

3: Mukherjea O. Y-4,5 (ca. 1933-1939) 1962.
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legendary migrations as we have already seen in the first chapter; and it was only at Campa that the *Kurmbis* adopted Hindu customs and manners. Therefore, there is a strong presumption that *Bedeas* who call themselves *Chot Kurmi*, might have once belonged to the Santal fold.

Coming to Man's list of Santal tribes, we find that he sticks to the traditional number twelve; but makes up the deficiency by referring to *Besras* and *Murmus* twice, under different spellings. Thus *Besras* pass also as *Bisras* and *Murmu* comes again as *Marmoring*. This mistake perhaps occurred in this way. Presumably Man asked a Santal about his clan and the man replied, "Murmu in." (*I am a Murmu.*) And from this he noted down the name of the tribe as "*Marmoring*".

There is general agreement about the names of clans (although with different spellings) except about *Bedeas*, *Kharwars* and *Gondwars*. An attempt should be made here to clear the prevailing confusion amongst ethnographers.

Kharwars

We find from Man and Col. Dalton's lists that they mention *Kedoar* and *Karwar* respectively as Santal clans. Presumably they are the same, under different spellings, of what is known as *Kharwars*. We have seen in our story of Santal Genesis and

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Migration that the original people called themselves *Kharwars*. Even today this tradition passes current amongst the Santals of Mayurbhanj, who say that their alternative name is "Kherwal" (with hard 'l'), although their common appellation is *Santal*. It is gathered that the Santals of Dhalbhum also call themselves *Kherwal* (with soft 'l'). The educated amongst the Santals believe that the word *Kherwal* is derived from the name of some ancient place somewhere in Bengal, where the pure Santals lived. For this they rely on the fact that they have some old songs which relate to "Gang nàni" which they identify with the Ganges. Therefore they believe that the place from which the name *Kherwal* was derived was somewhere in Bengal. There are, however, no *Kharwars* in Mayurbhanj as distinct from *Kherwals*[1].

Mr. Ragunath Mañjhi, a Santal teacher of Bamanghati, Mayurbhanj, was, however, inclined to the belief that the name came from *Kshatriyas*, meaning "those who fight". He also referred to a story current that the original Santals had a leader whose name was *Kharwar* and it is from him that they derived their name. Such popular beliefs were shared by many, as we found in course of our investigations.

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1. With acknowledgments to M. Laeequaddin, Esq. Census Officer, Mayurbhanj.

3i Mukherjea O. Y-4,5 (ca. 1933-1939) 1962
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All these however lead us nowhere. And all that we can guess in the absence of more reliable evidence is that there is no independent clan amongst the Santals bearing the name of *Kharwars* or *Kherwals*, and that perhaps some Santals when questioned by Man and Col. Dalton gave their clan as *Karwar* or *Kedoar* as the alternative of *Kharwars*, the traditional name for Santals, before they came to Saont or Sant in Midnapore.

It should be mentioned here that Risley in his *Tribes and Castes of Bengal*, gives the following equivalent of the general name Santal viz. *Saontar*, *Kharwar*, or *Safa-Hòṛ* and mentions *Kharwars* or *Safa-Hor* as 'sub-tribes' as well, but not as a sept (clan) name. We should add that the very name *Safa-Hòṛ* is not now much understood by the Mayurbhanj Santals. But we have very reliable evidence[1] to say that there was, in 1871, a movement in the Santal Parganas known as the *Kharwar movement* when some Santals declared themselves as *Safa-Hòṛ* (the pure men), after eschewing fowls, pigs and intoxicating liquor, but taking "gañja," (hemp, Canabinis Sativa) and tried to bring it on a line with Hindu practices. It led at a time to some local ferment and had also a political aspect. But beyond

1. Ref. *Dt. Gazetteer*, Santal Parganas, 1910, p. 145.

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this we do not know anything and no light is available to assert that *Kharwar* was ever a clan name.

It should, however, be noted here that the Mayurbhanj Census Report, 1931, (Vol. I, p. 215) opines that "the present Santals are the descendants of the section of the tribe who became followers of Bhagirath (the leader of the Kharwar movement)—a Santal who endeavoured to start a movement to turn out the Sahibs and Zemindars out of the country and who was tried for sedition in 1871 and imprisoned at Bhagalpur where he died."

Gòndwars

The Santals of Mayurbhanj when questioned invariably answered that they were twelve clans, but they made no mention of the *Bedea* (supposed to be lost) and made up for the deficiency by mentioning *Gòndwars*. This was remarkable as in no other account do we come across such a name. In course of searching enquiries also we could not meet any *Gòndwar*. [The Mayurbhanj Census Report (1931, Vol. I, p. 192) also mentions the clan.]

The general belief among the Santals is that *Gòndwars* occupy a low position among them as they are supposed to be a cross between *Gònd-Muṇḍà* and *Santals*. There is in existence in Mayurbhanj a class of "Hansdak's" called "Gòndwar-Hansdak's" and they are considered distinctly low in the esti-

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PREFACE

THIS study represents an attempt to provide the kind of book that I wish could have been placed in my hands when I first began to work among the Santals. It is based very largely on material gathered during my residence in the village of Sarenga, District Bankura, between October 1932 and April 1943. Much of what is said is true of the Santals wherever they are found. The uniformity of Santal culture over a wide area raises questions of great interest to students, but no attempt has been made to deal with them here. Nor have I attempted to deal with the wider questions involved in the problem of the Christian approach to peoples living in small-scale societies, though I hope that I may have been able to supply some data relevant to the discussion. We missionaries are at times impatient of the strictures of anthropologists, but we would do well to heed the warning of such a missionary as Dr. Kraemer when he says: "Missions make the claim, on account of their religious aim, that Christianity contains the forces of moral and spiritual regeneration so sorely needed in this time of disintegration. It is encouraging to read twice, for instance, in Monica Hunter's *Reaction to Conquest* that Christianity proves able to supply a new invigorating moral basis of life. Yet missions ought always to be mindful that this does not result *mechanically* from the acceptance of Christianity, but that to achieve it there is need for a constant application to the task of religious, moral, cultural and social education—and this must be inspired by the desire *to serve the true interests of the people.*"[1]

I count it among the more fortunate circumstances of my life that my first five years were spent at Pakur in the Santal Parganas; the investigations then begun perhaps helped to shape my outlook! During the years at Sarenga I came to owe a great debt to many individual Santals. Three men in particular helped by placing their knowledge at my disposal, and most of the statements in this book have been checked more than once in the course of many conversations with them. The late Ernest Soren was for many years headmaster of the Boys' School at Sarenga; he became a Christian in early manhood and was held in high regard by all who knew him, yet he never

[1] H. Kraemer, *The Christian Message in a non-Christian World*, London, 1938, p. 436. The italics are the author's.

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CHAPTER 2

THE SANTAL AND HIS NEIGHBOURS

WHATEVER difficulty there may be for others, the Santals make a clear distinction between themselves and Hindus, whom they call *Deko*. The basis of distinction is race rather than religion. The prevailing Indian identification of race with religion has caused some confusion in their minds, but the fact that about 50 per cent. of Santals were returned in 1931 as Hindus and most of the remainder as followers of tribal religion indicated the heightened political consciousness of the enumerators more than any real division within the tribe. In many areas the returns depended entirely on the views of the enumerator and his reading of the issues at stake. The census gave rise to discussions in Santal villages, during the course of which one Santal said: "I am a Santal; I can become a Christian or a Moslem, but I cannot become a *Deko*." When speaking among themselves the Santals usually refer to Hindus as *Deko pusi*. *Pusi* in Santali means a cat, and the term is usually reserved for the higher Hindu castes. An old man explained it thus: "The *Deko* are very greedy and cunning, and that is why they are called *pusi*. Whenever a cat sees that someone else has milk, curds, fish or any bits of food, he roams around with his 'mew-mew', and as soon as he sees an opportunity he pounces on the food and finishes it off. The *Deko* go round like that, looking out for opportunities. They make friends with the Santals, give them beer and spirits to drink, and deceive them when they are drunk—for the Santals have no sense: they are like sheep. They will go wherever a *Deko* wishes them to go, for they do not have a good command of the *Deko* language." In this description many elements in the attitude adopted towards the *Deko* find expression. The Santal feels superior and gives free rein to his contempt; at the same time he has good reason to be afraid, and he accords a grudging admiration to the cleverness of the *Deko*. There is even a certain good-humoured acceptance of the situation in which the Santal finds himself, for cats are found in every Santal home, and they are valued for their uses, though not regarded with great affection.

Santals are not free from that common fallacy of mankind which looks upon one's own kind as superior to all others and the rest of the world as "queer". *Deko* smell different, and one particular caste smells more than others. Some day, they feel,

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the tables may be turned on those who lord it over them. In Bodding's collection of the Folk-Tales[1] there are two stories which turn on the fact that the bodies of high-caste strangers house the souls of animals, while the bodies of men of low caste house human and beautiful souls. (The means by which the real person can be discerned is to look at him through the wing feather of a vulture.) In common with other tribes of their group and many primitive peoples in other parts of the world, the Santals refer to themselves as "men" (*hor*). A Santal once said in reply to a direct question as to whether any other race was superior to his: "No, there are no others who are greater than us. You can see that from the fact that even today our womenfolk will not eat rice that has been cooked by Brahmins. Formerly, when our menfolk ate Hindu rice they were made to sleep outside for one night; they could not sleep with their wives. When they brought rice from outside to the house they were made to eat it in the courtyard and clean up the place where they had eaten, and then wash their own eating utensils." Many Santals work as day labourers in the fields of well-to-do caste Hindus and receive payment in grain or sometimes in cooked food. The cooks in the homes of their employers are Brahmins, and so by refusing to acknowledge the supremacy of the Brahmin they hold themselves aloof from the Hindu social structure. Nevertheless, the complete aloofness of former days has been modified and is maintained only by the women. As one might expect, Santals share with others abhorrence of social customs which do not agree with their own standards of morality, and they exaggerate the iniquities practised by other peoples. The same person said: "When the *Deko* put out their lamps at night they have no sense of what is right and wrong. They respect no one, whether their younger brother's wife, elder brother's wife, their own sister or anyone else. Moreover, they do not respect any of their relations by marriage."

Many of the *Deko* make a living out of the Santal, as the cat finds its sustenance in his home. The analogy is by no means perfect, and its chief value for the Santal is that it ministers to his self-respect. In the Bankura district many of the landlords of the Santals are Sundis, who are themselves classified as an Exterior or Scheduled caste. Their hereditary occupation is the distilling and selling of spirits, and they are usually the lessees of the government liquor and drug shops. They owe their present

[1] P. O. Bodding, *Folk-Tales*, Vol. III, Nos. 74 and 77.